

# Committee on Resources

## Full Committee

---

### Witness Statement

---

TESTIMONY BY NOUSHER JAHEDI

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND RESOURCES, CONCERNING THE U.S.  
COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

SEPTEMBER 16, 1999

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BY:

NOUSHER JAHEDI

WASHINGTON, D.C.

TEL: 202-857-0664

TESTIMONY BY NOUSHER JAHEDI , BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND  
NATURAL RESOURCES, SEPTEMBER 16, 1999, CONCERNING THE U.S. COMMONWEALTH OF  
THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS (CNMI)

My name is Nousher Jahedi. I am from Bangladesh. I am the victim of human rights abuses and human trafficking in the United States Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. I am one of forty thousand foreign guest workers trapped there.

After my father passed away, I had to provide for my mother, four sisters, and young brother." I took a job at an American military base in Saudi Arabia, where I learned to speak English. I also came to admire the culture and values of "the greatest country on Earth."

I paid a \$7,000 "recruitment fee" to arrange for a job in "Saipan, USA." The job I was offered by the recruiter, who worked for a US citizen from CNMI, was working as a cleaner for a hotel. That was the beginning of a nightmare that has yet to end.

After I and eleven other Bangladeshis left our homes, we were taken by the recruiter to the Philippines, where we remained for 115 hellish days. We were kept in a room so small that only three of us could lie down at the same time. The "recruiter," a predatory human trafficker, even robbed me of \$1,700 at gunpoint.

Things got worse when I finally reached Saipan. The employer who had "recruited" us demanded an additional \$29,000 to obtain our jobs that only paid \$3.05 per hour-in essence forcing us to each work 20 weeks for free.

This was my first glimpse into how life under the U.S. flag in the CNMI is different than anywhere else on Earth.

I and the other Bangladeshis couldn't pay our prospective employer \$29,000, so we found ourselves homeless and destitute. I lived hand-to-mouth for a year before finally finding a menial job. On some days I only had one meal; on others I and the others went without food.

I came to the CNMI legally. I had working papers issued by the CNMI Department of Labor and Immigration. So I filed a legal complaint against him employer. Two and a half years later, my complaint is still being processed in a system overwhelmed with similar complaints from trafficked and exploited workers.

I have lost everything, everything. I can't believe I and forty thousand of my brothers and sisters are being treated like animals under the U.S. flag.

"Everything" includes not only my physical possessions, but my personal life as well. I borrowed \$3,500 from Bangladeshi money lenders to pay half of my recruitment fee. I was unable to repay the loan or its exorbitant interest. As a result, my family was trying to help have instead has been mercilessly harassed, even threatened.

I came to Washington DC to urge lawmakers to extend the rights and protection every other worker laboring under the American flag enjoys.

I face an uncertain future when I return to the CNMI. Since coming to the Washington, I have been warned I may be the next victim of hate crimes in the CNMI that have already claimed the lives of my fellow guest workers. But I don't care. I have lost everything, all I had has been taken from me. It is in God's hands. And yours'. Thank you.

# # #